

## *Awaken from your shock in time!*

*John 18: 28-40*

Over the last few weeks we've been reading in John the journey of Jesus' last few weeks. And often we focus on Jesus or perhaps one or two of the disciples, but what struck us as a worship team over the last while was that the aspects of grief that we all feel were felt by each and every one of the disciples and of course, Jesus himself. One of the aspect of grief which usually comes first (or sometimes it comes second after denial or anger) usually lasts anywhere from 60 minutes to 30 or so days, and it is called numbness. It is a gift from God. If you have ever gone through grief or even a moment of trauma as slight as a fender bender, you will know that odd feeling in your physical body, pins and needles.

The first time I became aware of grief and the numbness that comes with it was when I was in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. I had been an Ordained Minister for 11 months. I was at a big conference and someone came up to me and said, aren't you that new pastor from Spiritwood? Yep. You need to call home. And I had a sense that they didn't mean home like my mom and dad, but home like the chair of the Board.

I found out that something had happened. All that was known right now was that something had happened and I was to get home to Spiritwood. Now, if I had been given the chance to sit in a café or sit in my hotel room I would have begun making up imaginary stories in my mind of all the thousands and millions of things that could have just happened. But instead, I was given a very clear task: drive safely to Spiritwood from Prince Albert. And because of the gift of shock and numbness I was able to say to myself, I can forgive myself for not preparing for whatever is to come because I have no idea what is to come and I am just going to focus on getting home safely.

I don't remember the drive home all I remember is focussing on the highway, highway conditions and my speed, which was very good because just as I approached Spiritwood there was a huge police presence and barricade and my car was stopped and searched along with everyone else's. It was when I saw the first RCMP officer's face that I moved out of shock. I knew I had done what I was supposed to do and now I had to enter into reality. There had been a police shooting and two officers died within the next week. The shooter was a local man whose

mother was part of our congregation. It took us all a long time to move through the different aspects of grief.

This also happened to me when the wildfires happened in Slave Lake. I was given the same task: drive home. This time though I got to drive to my Mum and Dad's house, which did make it better. And again I had to just focus on the drive.

It is the numbness that just gets us through making the first phone calls. A time out of space and time, and it's a time outside of the pain and the love. The problem is, just like all of God's good gifts, it can seduce us into thinking that we need nothing else. It can become a lie that we tell ourselves. Oh I will stay here because here I feel no pain, here I need not do a thing. And like all of the aspects of grieving we can go from using it as a stepping stone to our next steps, to using it as an enclave.

In the pain and the trouble of the community of Jesus upon hearing his startling interpretations of their scriptures and religion, they were having trouble. Jesus was inviting them into a new way of understanding God's love for them, into understanding that no one could be so defiled, so dirty, that they could not approach the God of love.

The religious elite did not know how to grieve the identity that their religion and its laws had given them and so decided nope we are just going to be in denial and shock about all of this. They wanted to have their way, but they also wanted to stay away from the hard parts of change. And so they went, ironically, to the group of people who had been oppressing them for decades. Here you deal with this man who wants us to change. Why do you need me, says Pilate, to deal with your religious community? I am Pilate, I am the general of an army that has been oppressing and starving your people for decades. Oh no, we don't want to make any decisions that would lead to us having to make, well decisions, so we are just going to give him to you. The religious elite were fearful of what Jesus might be saying about their lives and fearful of what they believe needed to happen, which was the death of Jesus. They turned him over to Pilate, to another tradition's laws. And Pilate, wondering what is going on, listens to Jesus, who only asks him more questions. What is the truth? Who are you? Who do you think I am?

Pilate could have sat down and said, excuse me what? Pilate could have called in witnesses, there was at least twelve disciples that we know of who had witnessed what Jesus meant by his teachings. Instead, he thought, "I need to give this away as soon as possible. I don't want to make any decisions that would change my life or threaten my position." So he falls back on what the law says in his world, which is, I could free him, let's use an old law and you can say whether you want me to free him or not, you make that decision. He asked the very people Jesus was threatening, they pointed the finger at another man and Barabbas was freed and Jesus went to the gallows.

Pilate and the religious elite of Jerusalem and the Roman system of crucifixion killed Jesus. But all of them had a way out, a way to say "oh I didn't actually do it." And this is the seduction that

the numbness as well as the denial which Karen spoke of last week, tempts us to come to. We too, like those religious leaders, like the disciples, hear Jesus. Jesus says: Come into relationship.

Come into relationship with people who want to grow and mature, who want to serve their community, who want to, when needed, break off from traditions that no longer give life, and hold to traditions that are life giving. And so we fall in love with this message, we fall in love with the community that shares this message, but then the trouble starts. You see every time you love someone, even someone like Jesus, they're going to change you. They are going to ask for your heart to be a bit bigger. They are going to ask for some time in your schedule. They may even ask you to change your mind on an important question.

Now there are ways to get out of this. You can go and be a part of a community, Christian or otherwise, where all of the answers and decisions are made for you. But as you know here at Robertson-Wesley, there are other Christian communities where the minister is much more likely to say, "I don't know, what do you think?" Or to ask even harder questions, ones that we like to call "Karen questions" (for those of us who have been here for a few years). And even though sometimes I actually come up with the question, I just make Karen ask it. We ask you questions like, what would it mean to forgive that person? What would it mean for you to consider that person's feelings? What would it mean for you to actually believe God adores you just as you are right now?

One of the pieces of wisdom we receive when we are learning how to care for someone who is mourning or grieving is that in the immediate few days we may need to remind them to do their basics. Have you had a glass of water? Have you had a piece of toast? Have you been to bed yet? Have you gotten out of bed yet? But it is very important that after those first few days we ensure that they begin to look after those things themselves. We don't ask them to go back to work full-time and use it as a way to enter into another type of numbness. We may not even ask them to make their meals. We may fill up their freezer, but we do invite them to get out of bed each day, to shower, defrost the meal, to begin reading some of the cards that have come in; to begin to feel again.

This means being with them when they begin to feel and that can be very painful for us even as just the care giver. For they will feel all the feelings we've been speaking of. They will need to weep their tears. They will need to deny that it is all happening and then come through denial. Next week we will speak of the anger which comes in grief, which we need to sit and listen to. We must gather our strength as caregivers and take turns.

You may not always go to Pink! to hear your wisdom. For those of you who don't know, *Pink!* is a pop music phenomenon and like all, well many, women in the pop music scene, realized that her full name would be just too much for us to remember, so she chose Pink!, spelled with an exclamation mark. She wrote a song called *The Great Escape* and it is a song from her to us for when we are stuck in grief's numbness.

*I feel like I could wave my fist in front of your face,  
And you wouldn't flinch or feel a thing.*

*You've retreated to your silent corner,  
Like you've decided that the fight is over.*

*And everyone you know is trying to smooth things over,  
Trying to make the hurt go away.*

*But I won't let you make the great escape  
I'm not going to watch you check out of this place.*

*I am not going to lose you because the passion  
And the pain is what is going to keep you alive.*

*They are going to keep you alive.*

Following Christ means embracing the very thing that hurts the most, to fall in love with life, over and over again. Thanks be to God, who gives us community and courage to ensure that we never make the great escape, but rather choose life.

Amen

(<http://whataboutus.pinkspage.com/>)